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Give Thanks for H. Evan Runner

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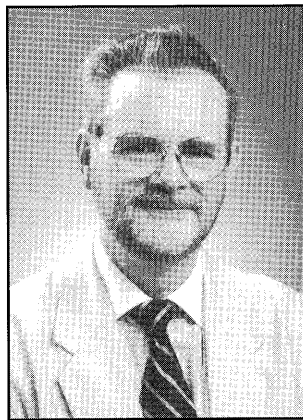
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**Editor's Note: This tribute was written in memory of Dr. H. Evan Runner, Professor of Philosophy at Calvin College from 1951-1981. Dr. Runner was "in many ways... responsible for the creation of the ICS [Institute for Christian Studies] in Toronto," and "gave inspirational leadership to the Association for the Advancement of Christian Scholarship (AACCS) in Canada" (Phil de Haan, Chimes, 3/29/03).*

Give Thanks for H. Evan Runner



by Keith C. Sewell

H. Evan Runner died on March 2002. A conference honoring Dr. Runner and his work was held at Redeemer College, Ancaster, Ontario, in October. I had the privilege of attending, even though I did not know the late H. Evan Runner very well personally. My introduction to reformational thinking was through David Hanson (England), Paul Schrottenboer (USA), and Jan Dengerink (The Netherlands)—the circle of the old International Association for Reformed Faith and Action (IARFA)—when I was living in England.

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Thereafter, I moved to Australia and also lived in New Zealand. I met Runner only on three occasions — once years ago in Toronto and a little later as his guest in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Finally, in the summer of 2001, my wife and I visited him when he was already frail.

His impact upon me and others was nevertheless profound because for a whole generation of us Anglophone Calvinists, he was a prime interpreter of the reformational philosophy that had blossomed so profoundly in the Netherlands in the twentieth century. His style was not always user-friendly. Perhaps on occasions he drove us to effort, and eventually comprehension, by first evoking bewilderment and perplexity. His unwillingness always to indulge our slowness could itself be beneficial. I recall seeing copies of *The Relation of the Bible to Learning*, dog-eared with heavy use, in distant New Zealand. *Scriptural Religion and Political Task* received similar treatment. Even if his presentations were sometimes wonderfully elliptical, he nevertheless opened up great vistas of thinking that would otherwise have been dominated by authors with formidably Dutch surnames. He was our valued gateway to their important work.

Some of his shorter addresses were truly seminal. I particularly recall reading his speech, *The Development of Calvinism in North America on the Background of its Development in Europe*, delivered in Calgary in November 1957. There is important matter in this address, matter which recasts our entire understanding of Calvinistic Christianity's history—especially versions thereof which still hold sway in the English-speaking world. We still

await the full historiographical amplification and refinement of what Runner said in that important presentation. And not surprisingly, we continue to live in times when many continue to insist that Puritanism stands as the apogee of Calvinism.

Indeed, we seem to be a very long way from fully appropriating the best of this man's legacy. It is sad that developments in more recent decades have not always been consistent with the foundational prin-

ciples that Runner sought to articulate. Yet for all that, I cherish his thought, and firmly believe that the best of his legacy will outlast that of many others. Not so easily will this scholarly prophet in Israel be forgotten. To this end, it is to be hoped that *The Works of H. Evan Runner* will soon issue from the presses of a reputable publisher. May we give thanks to the LORD for this man and remain mindful of his work among us.